

SHIGELLOSIS

What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is a gastrointestinal disease caused by a group of bacteria called *Shigella*. Illness often occurs 1 to 2 days after exposure to *Shigella*, and lasts 5 to 7 days. This disease can be quite severe and lead to hospitalization, especially in young children and the elderly. Some people with shigellosis have very few or no symptoms, but can still pass *Shigella* to others. The diagnosis is usually made when a laboratory finds *Shigella* in the stool of an infected person.

What are the symptoms of shigellosis?

Symptoms of shigellosis usually include diarrhea (occasionally bloody or mucousy), fever, and abdominal cramps. Most people with shigellosis recover completely. However, in a small percentage of people infected by *Shigella*, a condition called Reiter's syndrome can occur. Reiter's syndrome is the development of joint pain and swelling, eye irritation, and painful urination that occurs as a reaction to *Shigella* infection.

How do people get shigellosis?

The stool of an infected person contains *Shigella* while they are sick, and for more than a week afterwards. *Shigella* is spread when the stool of a sick person passes into the mouth of another person. Spread of the illness most often occurs due to person-to-person contact, especially within families and childcare centers due to inadequate hand washing and poor hygienic habits. Sometimes, *Shigella* can contaminate food and cause illness among those who eat the tainted item. Food items that have been sources of outbreaks have included parsley, cilantro, lettuce, raw oysters, and even a commercially prepared bean dip. Shigellosis can also occur after drinking or swimming in contaminated water.

Outbreaks have been reported among men who have sex with men, and among people living in crowded conditions with poor hygiene, such as jails and refugee camps.

How is shigellosis treated?

There are several antibiotics that can be used to treat shigellosis. Antibiotic-resistant *Shigella* has become increasingly common and will require health care providers to make treatment decisions. However, persons with mild infections usually recover without antibiotic treatment.

How common is shigellosis?

Shigella is especially prevalent in developing countries, and is responsible for an estimated 600,000 deaths per year worldwide. In the United States, about 18,000 cases are reported each year. The number of reported cases in California have generally declined over the past decade, with about 2500 cases reported statewide each year for the last few years. However, because many milder cases are not diagnosed or reported, the actual number of infections may be up to twenty times higher.

What can a person do to prevent shigellosis?

- Wash hands with soap and warm water carefully and frequently, especially after using the bathroom, after changing diapers, and before preparing foods or beverages
- Supervise handwashing of toddlers and small children after they use the toilet
- Dispose of soiled diapers properly, and disinfect diaper changing areas after using them
- Keep children with diarrhea out of child care settings
- Persons with diarrheal illness should not prepare food for others
- If you are traveling to the developing world, “boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it”
- Avoid drinking pool or recreational water
- Avoid fecal exposure during sex

What is the health department doing about shigellosis?

The California Department of Health Services and local health departments monitor the cases of shigellosis in California. If many cases occur at the same time, it may mean that a restaurant, food, or water supply has a problem that requires intervention by the health department. CDHS will work with local health departments to investigate outbreaks of illness, find the source of contamination, and devise control measures. If a number of cases occur in a day care center, or if a community-wide outbreak occurs, the health department can help educate the community to promote appropriate hygiene measures.

Where can I get more information on shigellosis?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has information available on their website

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/shigellosis_g.htm .